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LETTER DATED 1 NOVEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BURUNDI TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you in the annex below a document dated 31 October 1996, in which the Government of Burundi reminds the Security Council that it has fully complied with resolution 1072 (1996), and has fully met the conditions set by the countries of the Great Lakes region in imposing an economic blockade on Burundi. The document stresses the total lack of justification for the maintenance of this embargo, which has had inhumane and disastrous consequences for innocent people. It also draws attention to the preferential treatment accorded by the authors of those economic sanctions to the rebels who have perpetrated incalculable massacres in Burundi.

Also annexed hereto is a statement by the President of Burundi concerning the events taking place in Zaire and concerning our Government's readiness to welcome Burundi refugees returning voluntarily and peacefully to their country.

The Government of Burundi would be very grateful if you would have this letter and its annexes circulated as a Security Council document.

(Signed) NSANZE TERENCE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex I

Letter dated 31 October 1996 from the Secretary of State for Cooperation of Burundi addressed to the President of the Security Council

Following the meeting which the Burundi Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation had with you in New York on 3 October 1996, and mindful of the Security Council's continuing interest in the restoration of peace and democracy in Burundi, I have the honour to inform you of the efforts made in the context of our priorities and against the background of the recommendations of the countries of the subregion and resolution 1072 (1996).

As you are aware, on 25 July 1996 a transitional institutional system was introduced in Burundi for a three-year period. The change was made necessary by a tragic situation: institutional gridlock; the numerous instances of genocidal massacres; an atmosphere of insurrection; an awareness of the need for change on the part of the outgoing team, but no credible alternative; the risk of exposing the country to all kinds of turmoil; and the threat of widespread genocide.

On 2 August 1996, an open-ended government was formed embracing all the ethnic and regional components of the country, as well as the various political tendencies. The primary goal was to put Burundi back on the road to peace and democracy through dialogue and a national debate.

The National Assembly, the political parties and the politically oriented associations, which had been suspended on 25 July 1996, were restored by a decision of the Council of Ministers on 12 September, a decision legally ratified by a decree the following day, 13 September 1996.

In the immediate aftermath, the President of the Republic, speaking before the diplomatic corps and the international media that day, stated that the Government was firmly committed to holding negotiations with the armed factions without exception. The Permanent Mission of Burundi, on instructions from the Government, transmitted a written communication on that subject to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Moreover, in his statement delivered on 1 October 1996, during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation reiterated that commitment unambiguously. Almost at that very moment, the President of the Republic of Burundi was sending a letter to you and to the Secretary-General outlining his comprehensive plan for those negotiations and the peace process.

Unfortunately, the President of the Republic of Burundi was not invited to present his peace plan in person and comment on it before the heads of State of the subregion - who met in Arusha on 12 October 1996 precisely in order to discuss the destiny of Burundi - although he had requested an opportunity to do so. On the other hand, representatives of the fundamentalist rebels and of the Front pour la démocratie au Burundi, one of the 14 registered parties in Burundi, were afforded all the facilities and logistical support for their attendance in Arusha.

At the close of the Summit, which had brought together the coalition of leaders of the countries that had imposed a total embargo on Burundi on 31 July 1996, in violation of universally recognized norms and principles, the participants sent a delegation to Bujumbura on 18 October 1996, composed of three ministers from the United Republic of Tanzania, Zaire and Uganda and Ambassadors from Kenya and Cameroon. They brought a message to the President of the Republic of Burundi, which read as follows:

> "The heads of State of the subregion warmly welcomed the peace plan elaborated by President Buyoya and his Government. They particularly welcomed the commitment to negotiate peace with all the parties concerned. The heads of State of the subregion have confidence in President Buyoya as a person."

I am happy to note that the same assessment of the course events have taken in Burundi emerges from the meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the President of the Security Council, held in New York on 27 September 1996. Also, I am confident that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, delegated to meet with the President of the Republic on 5 October 1996, has been able to confirm the fact that the Burundi head of State and his Government are displaying all the political will and flexibility needed to advance the peace process.

It is nevertheless a matter of regret that the Arusha Summit of 12 October 1996, rather than reacting to the progress achieved, opted to maintain the embargo, knowing that it inflicts enormous suffering on the most vulnerable segments of a society that has been ravaged for the last three years, that it encourages the rise of extremist groups and that it poses a serious obstacle to the negotiations and to peace. Indeed, the armed factions, which have been given haven by some of the authors of the embargo and have misused the status of refugees to infiltrate Burundi and commit terrorist acts, do not feel bound to give effect to a reciprocal commitment. Instead, they have the impression that all they need do now is to set their sights on a solution by armed force and to wait for the embargo to help them.

My Government therefore considers it urgent and essential that the Security Council should understand that the embargo, which has a harsh impact primarily on the most vulnerable people, endangers the prospects of a negotiated settlement of the political crisis in Burundi, and that the Council should consequently abandon the idea of threatening additional sanctions. My Government hopes that the Security Council will instead send a loud and clear message to the authors of the embargo that they should lift it without further delay. In this way, the high forum over which you preside will have helped to assuage the indescribable suffering of the Burundi people and restore in Burundi a climate favourable to the implementation of the peace plan put forward by the President of the Republic and welcomed by many national and international persons of authority.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a Security Council document.

(Signed) Léonidas HAVYARIMARA
Secretary of State for Cooperation

Annex II

Statement dated 31 October 1996 by the President of the Republic of Burundi concerning the conflict in eastern Zaire

1. For the last few days, the world has been witnessing a conflict unfolding in eastern Zaire. That conflict is beginning to look more and more like a real war, as it leaves a trail of violence and destroyed lives and property.

We have all the more reason to fear this war as it is taking place in a subregion where ethnic manipulation, ideology and genocidal practices are fraught with tragic consequences.

2. Faced with this situation, the Government of Burundi strongly refutes, once more, the allegations made by the Zairian authorities in their attempt to implicate it in the conflict.

Burundi challenges them to supply the slightest piece of evidence of its involvement in this war.

On the other hand, the Government of Burundi would remind everyone that it is in Zairian territory that, for the last three years, terrorist and genocidal organizations have been formed, trained and equipped to bring disorder and death to Burundi.

3. Nevertheless, the Government of Burundi reaffirms its commitment to peace and is glad to welcome all initiatives to ensure a lasting peace in the Great Lakes region.

With regard to the regional conference advocated by certain countries, the Government of Burundi would like more information on its objectives and agenda, as well as on the role that Burundi would be called upon to play in it.

4. The conflict in eastern Zaire is engulfing thousands of Burundi refugees, condemning them to insecurity and forcing them to remain on the move.

The Government of Burundi appeals to those refugees who have not already done so to return to their country. It is ready to welcome them with full dignity, provided that they return peacefully and without weapons.

Burundi will do everything in its power to resettle them quickly in their homeland.

The Government asks the international community to help it do so, bearing in mind the particular constraints it is experiencing as a result of the embargo imposed on it for the last three months.

5. As some have recognized, the disastrous situation in progress in eastern Zaire is unfortunately the result of bad management of the refugee problem by the international community.

For years, it has tolerated a situation in which the masses of refugees have, in violation of international law, been manipulated, taken hostage and used by terrorist organizations guilty of crimes against humanity. This has spawned the disaster we are now witnessing, which threatens peace in the subregion.

The Government of Burundi wishes to draw the international community's attention to the fact that the same mistaken approach is leading it to tolerate and accept the imposition of an unjust and immoral embargo on Burundi, in flagrant violation of all international laws.

There is the danger that tomorrow this may give rise to a disaster like the one currently unfolding in eastern Zaire.

Consequently, the Government calls once again upon the international community, and particularly upon the countries of the subregion, to ensure an early end to the unjust and illegal embargo imposed on Burundi.

Indeed, as already stated, the embargo undeniably destroys the chances for peace.